

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 3355

To address the workforce needs of the telecommunications industry.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

FEBRUARY 27, 2020

Mr. THUNE (for himself, Mr. TESTER, Mr. MORAN, Mr. PETERS, and Mr. WICKER) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To address the workforce needs of the telecommunications industry.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

4 This Act may be cited as the “Telecommunications
5 Skilled Workforce Act”.

6 SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.

7 In this Act:

8 (1) 5G.—The term “5G”, with respect to wire-
9 less infrastructure and wireless technology, means

1 fifth-generation wireless infrastructure and wireless
2 technology.

3 (2) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMIT-
4 TEES.—The term “appropriate congressional com-
5 mittees” means—

6 (A) the Committee on Commerce, Science,
7 and Transportation of the Senate;

8 (B) the Committee on Health, Education,
9 Labor, and Pensions of the Senate;

10 (C) the Committee on Energy and Com-
11 merce of the House of Representatives; and

12 (D) the Committee on Education and
13 Labor of the House of Representatives.

14 (3) BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE.—The term
15 “broadband infrastructure” means any buried, un-
16 derground, or aerial facility, and any wireless or
17 wireline connection, that enables users to send and
18 receive voice, video, data, graphics, or any combina-
19 tion thereof.

20 (4) COMMISSION.—The term “Commission”
21 means the Federal Communications Commission.

22 (5) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—The
23 term “institution of higher education” has the
24 meaning given the term in section 101 of the Higher
25 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001).

1 (6) RURAL AREA.—The term “rural area”
2 means any area other than—

3 (A) a city, town, or incorporated area that
4 has a population of more than 20,000 inhab-
5 itants; or
6 (B) an urbanized area adjacent to a city or
7 town that has a population of more than
8 50,000 inhabitants.

9 (7) SECRETARY.—Except as otherwise provided,
10 the term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Labor.

11 (8) STATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
12 BOARD.—The term “State workforce development
13 board” means a State workforce development board
14 established under section 101 of the Workforce In-
15 novation and Opportunity Act (29 U.S.C. 3111).

16 **SEC. 3. INTERAGENCY WORKING GROUP EVALUATION.**

17 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 60 days after the
18 date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary, in consulta-
19 tion with the Chairman of the Commission, shall convene
20 an interagency working group to develop recommendations
21 to address the workforce needs of the telecommunications
22 industry.

23 (b) DUTIES.—In developing recommendations under
24 subsection (a), the interagency working group shall—

- 1 (1) determine whether, and if so how, any Federal
2 laws (including regulations), policies, or practices,
3 or any budgetary constraints, inhibit institutions
4 of higher education or for-profit businesses
5 from establishing, adopting, or expanding programs
6 intended to address the workforce needs of the tele-
7 communications industry, including the workforce
8 needed to build and maintain the 5G wireless infra-
9 structure necessary to support 5G wireless tech-
10 nology;
- 11 (2) identify potential policies and programs that
12 could encourage and improve coordination among
13 Federal agencies, between Federal agencies and
14 States, and among States, on telecommunications
15 workforce needs;
- 16 (3) identify ways in which existing Federal pro-
17 grams, including programs that help facilitate the
18 employment of veterans and military personnel
19 transitioning into civilian life, could be leveraged to
20 help address the workforce needs of the tele-
21 communications industry;
- 22 (4) identify ways to encourage individuals and
23 for-profit businesses to participate in qualified in-
24 dustry-led workforce development programs, includ-
25 ing the Telecommunications Industry Registered Ap-

1 apprenticeship Program and other industry-recognized
2 apprenticeship programs;

3 (5) identify ways to improve recruitment in
4 qualified industry-led workforce development pro-
5 grams, including the Telecommunications Industry
6 Registered Apprenticeship Program and other indus-
7 try-recognized apprenticeship programs; and

8 (6) identify Federal incentives that could be
9 provided to institutions of higher education, for-pro-
10 fit businesses, State workforce development boards,
11 or other relevant stakeholders to establish or adopt
12 programs, or expand current programs, to address
13 the workforce needs of the telecommunications in-
14 dustry, including such needs in rural areas.

15 (c) MEMBERS.—The interagency working group con-
16 vened under subsection (a) shall be composed of represen-
17 tatives of such Federal agencies and relevant non-Federal
18 industry stakeholder organizations as the Secretary con-
19 siders appropriate, including—

20 (1) a representative of the Department of Edu-
21 cation, appointed by the Secretary of Education;

22 (2) a representative of the National Tele-
23 communications and Information Administration,
24 appointed by the Assistant Secretary of Commerce
25 for Communications and Information;

(3) a representative of the Department of Commerce, appointed by the Secretary of Commerce;

(4) a representative of the Commission, appointed by the Chairman of the Commission;

5 (5) a representative of the Telecommunications
6 Industry Registered Apprenticeship Program, ap-
7 pointed by the Secretary;

8 (6) a representative of a telecommunications in-
9 dustry association, appointed by the Chairman of
10 the Commission;

(7) a representative of an Indian Tribe or Tribal organization, appointed by the Secretary;

(8) a representative of a rural telecommunications carrier, appointed by the Secretary; and

17 (d) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than 180 days
18 after the date on which the interagency working group is
19 convened under subsection (a), the interagency working
20 group shall submit to the appropriate congressional com-
21 mittees a report containing recommendations to address
22 the workforce needs of the telecommunications industry.

23 (e) POWERS.—

(1) HEARINGS.—The interagency working group convened under subsection (a) may hold such

1 hearings, sit and act at such times and places, take
2 such testimony, and receive such evidence as the
3 interagency working group considers advisable to
4 carry out the objectives of this section.

5 (2) INFORMATION FROM FEDERAL AGENCIES.—
6 The interagency working group convened under sub-
7 section (a) may secure directly from any Federal
8 agency such information as the interagency working
9 group considers necessary to carry out the provisions
10 of this section. Upon request of the interagency
11 working group, the head of such agency shall furnish
12 such information to the interagency working group.

13 (3) POSTAL SERVICES.—The interagency work-
14 ing group convened under subsection (a) may use
15 the United States mails in the same manner and
16 under the same conditions as other Federal agencies.

17 (f) PERSONNEL.—

18 (1) TRAVEL.—The members of the interagency
19 working group convened under subsection (a) shall
20 not receive compensation for the performance of
21 services for the interagency working group, but shall
22 be allowed travel expenses, including per diem in lieu
23 of subsistence, at rates authorized for employees of
24 agencies under subchapter I of chapter 57 of title 5,
25 United States Code, while away from their homes or

1 regular places of business in the performance of
2 services for the interagency working group. Notwith-
3 standing section 1342 of title 31, United States
4 Code, the interagency working group may accept the
5 voluntary and uncompensated services of members of
6 the interagency working group.

7 (2) DETAIL OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.—
8 Any employee of the Federal Government may be
9 detailed to the interagency working group convened
10 under subsection (a) without reimbursement, and
11 such detail shall be without interruption or loss of
12 civil service status or privilege.

13 (g) NONAPPLICABILITY OF FACA.—The Federal Ad-
14 visory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App.) shall not apply to
15 the interagency working group convened under subsection
16 (a).

17 (h) SUNSET.—The interagency working group con-
18 vened under subsection (a) shall terminate on the day
19 after the date on which the interagency working group
20 submits the report to Congress under subsection (d).

21 **SEC. 4. TELECOMMUNICATIONS WORKFORCE GUIDANCE.**

22 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, in consultation
23 with the Chairman of the Commission, shall establish and
24 issue guidance on how States can address the workforce

1 needs of the telecommunications industry, including guid-
2 ance on how a State workforce development board can—
3 (1) utilize Federal resources available to States
4 to meet the workforce needs of the telecommuni-
5 cations industry; and
6 (2) promote and improve recruitment in qualifi-
7 fied industry-led workforce development programs,
8 including the Telecommunications Industry Reg-
9 istered Apprenticeship Program and other industry-
10 recognized apprenticeship programs.

11 **SEC. 5. GAO ASSESSMENT OF WORKFORCE NEEDS OF THE**
12 **TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY.**

13 Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment
14 of this Act, the Comptroller General of the United States
15 shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees
16 a report that estimates the number of skilled telecommuni-
17 cations workers that will be required to build and main-
18 tain—

19 (1) broadband infrastructure in rural areas;
20 and
21 (2) the 5G wireless infrastructure needed to
22 support 5G wireless technology.

